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On the Diagnosis of disease, and the importance of distinguishing a state of Excitement in the circulation, from one of Inflammation. By Walter Somerville of Virginia.

Read March 22d 1826

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On the Diagnosis of disease, and the importance of distinguishing a state of Excitement in the circulation, from one of Inflammation.

In reviewing the multifarious, extensive, and interesting subjects, relative to the science of Medicine, we cannot fail to be convinced, of the great importance of them all, and of the imperious attention, which they demand of us. Indeed so intimately connected to each other, are the different branches of our science, that a perfect knowledge of the one, is unattainable, without some previous acquaintance with the others. Like the constellations of the celestial world, they mutually tend to enlighten and support each other, by the reflection which they equally diffuse.

Among the many subjects embraced within the circle of our science, there is not one in the whole catalogue, which more strongly demands our attention, or upon which, our success in the treatment of disease more depends, than that of Diagnosis, or the symptoms by

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which we distinguish disease. It is here, that an acquaint-ance with the different branches of our profession is called into requisition, here the whole of our knowledge must be concentrated, our judgment and discrimination exerted, and it is here, more than in the exercise of any other part of our profession, that we are caused to lament the imperfection of our art. In proportion therefore to the difficulty and importance of the subject, should be our exertion to render it familiar. It is our object in the present inquiry, to review the different means to which we resort for distinguishing disease.

For the attainment of this end, an acquaintance with the symptoms of particular diseases, will intuitively strike us, as being one of the primary and most essential requisites; and to become acquainted with the symptoms of disease it will be necessary in the first place, to study them as they have been detailed by the most respectable writers.

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for the accuracy by which they have detailed the symp-
-toms of disease, and pointed out their pathognomic
characteristics, the illustrious and immortal Cullen
undoubtedly deserves the superiority. To a mind by
nature rigorous and comprehensive, were united
sound judgment and discrimination, together
with remarkable powers of observation and reflec
-tion. Talents such as these, are seldom to be met
with, and very rarely concentrated in the same
individual. Guided by the symptoms which he
has laid down, and assisted by our own observa
-tions, we will generally succeed in this important
end; but cases sometimes occur which baffle the most
experienced and judicious.

Next to an acquaintance with the symptoms of dis
-eases, an accurate knowledge of Anatomy is of
the greatest importance, in forming an accurate
diagnosis. By its assistance, we are enabled to detect
and comprehend the anomalous forms of diseases

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action which so frequently present themselves. By it, we can comprehend, why different organs, and parts of the animal machine; in some cases are through the medium of sympathy more affected than those in which the disease is primarily seated. By its assistance we can readily conceive in what manner, enlargements of the pancreas, produce a constipation of the bowels, vomiting, and great uneasiness, immediately after taking food &c, in consequence of its pressure on the duodenum. Deprived of its aid, we should be unable to account for those cerebral affections many of which have their origin in the stomach, but through the influence of the nerves, extend their power to the brain. Indeed without an acquaintance with the structure and formation of the human system, the science of Medicine would be not only a useless but a dangerous art, involved in obscurity and empyricism.

Among the methods to which we resort for distin-

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[illegible] these two conditions of the system, that a distinction may be formed. In inflammation, the pulse is quick, frequent, full and hard, and there is heat, pain [illegible] [illegible]. In excitement likewise we find the pulse [illegible] [illegible] the same, but there is an absence of pain in a particular part, [illegible] [illegible] to [illegible] [illegible] to exist in the state of the vessels in inflammation [illegible] [illegible] of the other parts. The state of the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in case, but there is [illegible] [illegible] a greater accumulation of blood than in simple excitement. In inflammation we [illegible] generally find congestions of blood [illegible] [illegible] in the capillary vessels, while we believe that in excitement the system [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. [illegible] experiments of [illegible]. Thus on the foot of the [illegible], the mesentery of the rabbit [illegible] [illegible] clearly established, that the state of the vessels in inflammation, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] and debility; while that of the [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] from the established state of the [illegible]
[illegible] we have seen, [illegible] local attention
[illegible] the [illegible] of the cavities
[illegible] contrasted with that of the [illegible]
[illegible] the [illegible] of the [illegible]
[illegible] that of the cavities.

It is thus probable that the pain in [illegible]
[illegible] inevitably [illegible] in the cavities
[illegible] by [illegible] [illegible]
of the part. This [illegible] is [illegible] by
the fact that the [illegible] and [illegible] for
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vessels, to which we have frequently alluded. Another diagnostic by which we may judge of the presence or absence of inflammation is the appearances of the blood drawn. These appearances however are so familiar to us all, that it will be unnecessary to describe them minutely, particularly as they have been so accurately detailed, by almost every writer on inflammation. The existence of the buffy coat although not an infallible indication of inflammation, yet it is an evidence upon which we can safely rely. There is one state of the pulse usually present in inflammation, which will serve as an important distinction between inflammation and excitement. It is the hard and chorded state of the pulse, which though generally attendant upon inflammation seldom or never exists in excitement.

By a review of the different symptoms of inflammation we shall find, that next to the pulse, the existence

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of local pain constitutes one of the most certain diagnostics between inflammation and excitement. We have now we believe mentioned the most important means by which we can distinguish those different states of the circulation; and we think that by calling to our aid all those different resources, viz the state of the pulse, the existence or absence of local pain, the appearances of the blood drawn, &c. that this important distinction may be formed. But in this case as well as in forming a distinction between diseases generally, let us ever bear in mind, the importance of ascertaining, with some degree of certainty the nature of the case before us, let us ever remember, that it would be better to entrust the case to the Vis Medicatrix Naturæ, than resort to vigorous and doubtful measures; and let this maxim be ever present with us "Anceps remedium peior nulla"